Governments write to them. I would like to know whether the Ministry of Tourism would send their officials to assess the damage caused to the tourist spots in all these four regions.I would like to know whether the required financial assistance would be given by them or not.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: Sir, I think, we must understand and appreciate that there is a fine difference in pilgrims worshipping and the tourists who go to see the places of worships. So, people who went to Velankanni Church were not strangers who went to see the architecture or the local myth and folklore. They went to worship there which is a yearly practice. Of course, the loss of these pilgrims and the people who went to worship is horrifying, and there is no compensation for that,but to term them as tourists gets a little confusing because the tourism has a specific agenda when people travel. The religious-tourism is a different issue which has to be examined and understood by the hon. Member. I am willing to sit with him separately and tell him. Now, the other issue, Sir, is that whether our panel has gone. Of course, immediately post-Tsunami, several measures were taken on how to contain the damage, as well as understand and estimate the damage that was done. A group of Experts consisting of different officials at different levels was sent from the Ministry. We. are also collaborating with the State Governments to get the specific data as they perceive. Special reconstruction approaches and packages will be considered based on what the State Governments have asked for, and so far, it is only Tamil Nadu that has written back asking for specific help. As for the other three States, we are awaiting replies from them.

Regulatory Commission for the Petroleum Sector

*287. DR. VIJAY MALLYA:

SHRI LALIT SURI :††

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have planned to set up a Regulatory Commission for the Petroleum sector;

(b) if so, whether it is to protect the interest of consumers on the lines of Telecom and Power Regulatory Commission;

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the house by Shri Lalit Suri

(c) if not, whether there are any other specific purpose for establishment of such Commission for the Petroleum sector; and

(d) by when it will be commissioned?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (d) Government have under consideration a Bill to set up a Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board to ensure uninterrupted and adequate supply of petroleum products and natural gas to all parts of the country, including remote areas, at fair prices and to establish sectoral regulations to ensure competition, protect consumers and encourage investment as well as take action in case of violation of Rules and Regulations of the Board.

The Proposal is under consideration of a Group of Ministers.

SHRI LALIT SURI: Sir, an efficient distribution network will be required to watch and protect the interests of all the concerned parties, particularly, the consumer. My question is, since this is of utmost importance, is there a time-frame within which this Commission will be set up and whether there are any suggestions from various Government agencies regarding this Bill. Petroleum is a Central Subject under Section 7 of the Constitution, but the States could also get involved. Is there any proposal to involve the States and various other agencies in this?

SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR: Sir, may I clarify that we are not talking about a Commission, but about a Regulatory Board. The Regulatory Board will come into existence when Parliament passes the appropriate legislation. Since the Houses of Parliament are sovereign, it is really for the House to determine when the Bill will get passed. At the moment, there is a Group of Ministers that is looking into some of the few remaining outstanding issues in this regard. I hope that we will be able to resolve the issues in the immediate future and bring this Bill to the House.

As regards the other question on the involvement of outside agencies, as well as the State Governments, the proposals in regard to the Bill have

been in the public realm for several years now. We have received a very, very large number of suggestions from various quarters and these have all been looked at, partly by the Standing Committee twice over, and by our own Ministry. We hope that the Bill which we will be eventually presenting in Parliament will meet the requirements of all concerned.

SHRI LALIT SURI: I would like to thank you, Mr. Minister, I am quite satisfied with your reply to this question. But, I would like to ask you the question whether the Government has considered the aspect as to where the appeal against the order of the proposed Board would lie.

SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR: Yes, Sir, I think I can say, and I hope, I am not breaching propriety in doing this, that there has been a proposal that we might have a common Appellate authority for more than just Petroleum and Natural Gas, but it is for us to extend the power.This is an issue that is under consideration. It will require the views of the Ministry of Law and Justice. They are being consulted in this regard. When the Bill is presented, you would know what is the exact limit of the proposed Regulatory Board.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is enough. Next question, Question No 288.

वित्तीय घाटे को कम करने के लिए समय-सीमा

*288. **श्री रवि शंकर प्रसाद** :

डा. मुरली मनोहर जोशी : **††**

क्या वित्त मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) क्या यह सच है कि वित्तीय घाटे को धीरे-धीरे कम करके इसे समाप्त करने हेतु कोई समय-सीमा तय की गई है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो समय-सीमा का ब्यौरा क्या है;

(ग) क्या सरकार ने उक्त समय-सीमा का लक्ष्य प्राप्त करने हेतु व्यय में कटौती करने का कोई निर्णय लिया है; और

(घ) यदि हां, तो व्यय में कटौती करने के लिए प्राथमिकता के आधार पर किन-किन क्षेत्रों का निर्धारण किया गया है?

†† यह प्रश्न सभा में श्री रवि शंकर प्रसाद द्वारा पूछा गया।